

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Americas Mark a Decade of the Inter-American Democratic Charter

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — On September 11, 2001, the nations of the Western Hemisphere reached accord on the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which has guided the growth of democracy across the region.

“We all agreed — and I quote — that ‘the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend,’” Deputy Secretary of State William Burns said in prepared remarks September 3 in Valparaiso, Chile, as the charter celebrated its 10th year.

“That obligation neither begins nor ends at the ballot box,” Burns said. “All societies must deal with the threat of violence, desperation and extremism. And our best answer — then and now — is to put forward a broad, positive agenda that offers rights, freedoms, security, justice, social inclusion and economic progress for all the people of this hemisphere and the world.”

The Inter-American Democratic Charter was adopted on September 11, 2001, at a special session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Lima, Peru. The OAS member nations gathered September 3-4, 2011, in Valparaiso to reaffirm their commitment to the principles of the charter and celebrate its 10th anniversary.

The charter is binding on all 34 nations in the OAS, and it spells out what democracy is and how it is to be defended when it comes under attack. Cuba is the only hemispheric nation not a member of the OAS.

“Ten years ago, on a date tinged with tragedy, we took a hopeful, historic step forward together as a community of shared values,” Burns said September 3.

On the same day that terrorists carried out three attacks on the United States, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell remained in Lima until the OAS General Assembly had adopted the Inter-American Democratic Charter, Burns added. Powell left the special session about midday to return to the United States. The Atlanta-based Carter Center’s Americas Program helped to advise the OAS on the formulation of the charter.

Burns said the landmark Inter-American Charter emphasizes the essential link between democracy and social and economic development, which provides a basis for moving from democratic governments to democratic societies.

Strengthened democratic institutions have broadened economic opportunity across the hemisphere, improved conditions for civic expression and participation, reduced poverty and better served the basic needs of citizens, Burns said.

However, Burns added that the successes are not the whole story. He said progress is unmistakable, but it is also incomplete and uneven.

“When opposition leaders face politicized prosecutions and newspapers are intimidated into silence, that undermines democracy before a single vote is cast,” Burns said. “When human rights activists are threatened, that makes all citizens less secure.”

“Democratic principles threatened anywhere are a challenge for democracies everywhere,” he added.

Burns said that in a generation the Americas have transformed from an exception to democratic progress to an example of it.

New Pacts Aim to Protect Central American Migrant Workers

Washington — The United States is taking steps to ensure that migrant workers understand their rights under U.S. law, especially in regard to fair wages and safe working conditions, and that U.S. employers respect those rights.

In an August 29 ceremony in Washington, U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis signed joint declarations and letters of arrangement with Ambassador Aníbal de Castro of the Dominican Republic, Ambassador Muni Figueres of Costa Rica and Ambassador Francisco Altschul of El Salvador to protect the labor rights of migrant workers from those countries who are employed in the United States.

The ambassadors of Mexico, Nicaragua and Guatemala, who previously signed agreements with the Labor Department, also participated in the ceremony, which was held on the first day of Labor Rights Week, a week when the U.S. Labor Department and a network of 50 Mexican consulates across the United States cooperate to educate migrant workers and their employers.

Throughout the week, training events, workshops and information-sharing events on the rights and responsibilities of workers were held in the states of Arizona, California, Georgia, Missouri, Nevada, Texas, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, as well as the District of Columbia (Washington).

“Our goal is to help workers and employers understand that labor laws are enforced and enforceable, giving

everyone the opportunity to comply with the U.S. laws that cover all workers," said Secretary Solis. "Most employers take seriously their obligation to abide by the basic labor laws of this country. Today's signing ceremony will ensure that important information on wages, health and safety rights [is] available to more workers, enabling them to be more knowledgeable and ultimately more productive, with a vested interest in the success of their employers."

Under the declarations, the embassies and consulates of the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and El Salvador agreed to cooperate with the regional enforcement offices of the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and its Wage and Hour Division to distribute information about U.S. health, safety and wage laws.

In conjunction with the declarations, the letters of agreement state that the Wage and Hour Division will protect the rights of migrant workers in low-wage industries such as hospitality and agriculture, while OSHA will continue efforts to improve workplace safety and health conditions as well as provide outreach and assistance to Spanish-speaking workers and employers.

World Community Welcomes Libya's Transitional Council

Washington — Leaders of nations and international organizations are welcoming Libya back into the community of nations, while recognizing that Libyan civilians need continued NATO protections until the threat of violence has passed.

"Nearly 70 countries so far have recognized the TNC [Transitional National Council], including 18 African nations, the Arab League and now Russia," said U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at a Paris briefing September 1. "It is time for others to follow suit," she said after a multilateral meeting where leaders sketched the outline of a new Libya, won through a citizen uprising that began six months ago.

Mustafa Abdul Jalil, chairman of the TNC, attended the Paris meeting, organized after the rebels gained control of the capital, Tripoli, about a week ago. Jalil said in Paris that the world had placed a bet on the success of the insurgents. "The Libyans showed their courage and made their dream real," he said.

International leaders acknowledged that the TNC will need help to set the nation aright after 40 years in the grip of President Muammar Qadhafi, and giving the rebel leadership access to national assets is a key step.

"The United States and our partners have worked

through the United Nations to unfreeze billions of dollars in order for Libya to get access to their state assets to meet critical needs," said Clinton. She said a release of Libyan funds was in motion, with the expectation that \$1.5 billion might be disbursed within days.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who hosted the meeting with British Prime Minister David Cameron, also expressed willingness to recognize the TNC as the legitimate claimant to those funds. "We are committed to returning to the Libyans the monies of yesterday for the building of tomorrow," Sarkozy said.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon represented the United Nations in Paris and called on the Security Council to make a decision on deployment of a civilian mission to assist in stabilizing the country and building civic institutions.

In return for international support, Jalil said, the fledgling leadership of Libya must "have security in Libya, tolerance and forgiveness must be promoted, the state of law must be respected."

Clinton commended the TNC for its repeated pledges to pursue those values in governance. "The international community will be watching and supporting Libya's leaders as they keep their commitments to conduct an inclusive transition, act under the rule of law, and protect vulnerable populations," Clinton said. "And that should include enshrining the rights of women as well as men in their new constitution."

The TNC leaders requested the expertise of other governments in a wide range of activities, Clinton said, such as establishing an accountable and transparent financial system and an impartial and independent police force. She said the TNC will also seek assistance from the international community in resolving social needs such as housing for citizens who fled the violence and return to wrecked homes.

Clinton said the Paris meeting "validated the confidence that all the other nations around the table had placed in the TNC." At the same time, she said, "they still have a huge hill to climb here."

With the sanction of a U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing a no-fly zone over Libya, the U.S., European and Arab partners began operations in March to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Libya and address the threat posed to international peace and security as Qadhafi violently cracked down on protesters and civilians fled the country.

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